**Are worksheets Effective as an Instructional and Assessment Tool?**



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**Table of Contents**

Abstract…………………………………………………………………………….

Introduction…………………………………………………………………………

* Statement of the Problem …………………………………………………… 2
* Review of Related Literature………………………………………………… 4-12
* Statement of Hypothesis……………………………………………………… 12

Method………………………………………………………………………………..

* Participants…………………………………………………………………….13
* Instrument……………………………………………………………………...13
* Experimental Design…………………………………………………………..
* Procedure………………………………………………………………………

Results…………………………………………………………………………………

Discussion……………………………………………………………………………

References……………………………………………………………………………14-17

Appendices……………………………………………………………………………

-A- Principal Consent Form………………………………………………………..18

-B- Parent Consent Form…………………………………………………………...19

-C- Worksheet……………………………………………………………………20-21

**Statement of the Problem**

It is believed that worksheets are effective in instructing and assessing learners in literacy skills. Although worksheets are believed to be effective, there are others who feel that using worksheets in the classroom if not monitored or implemented properly canbe counterproductive to literacy development. Choo, Rotagans, Schmidt, and Yew (2011) found out that using worksheets to build scaffolding techniques may not contribute significantly to problem based learning. This action research project will evaluate the effectiveness of worksheets as both an instructional and assessment tool in a third grade classroom.

**Introduction**

The issue of which approach is best to teach literacy skills has always been debated by educators. The Whole Language and Phonetic approach are viewed by some educators to be the best, however many educators believed the Balanced Approach is the best, being a combination of both the Whole Language and the Phonetic approach. Literacy development is of paramount importance in the elementary grades, it sets the foundation for all future learning, if encompasses a series of skills which help individuals to read and write efficiently in all subject areas. Some literacy skills are the awareness of the sounds of language, awareness of print and the relationship between lettersand sounds, vocabulary, spelling, and comprehension. Under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 schools are held accountable for students’ achievement regardless of color, race, ethnicity, disability and socio economic status, therefore it is imperative that schools ensure that credible literacy programs are put in place to assisttheir students tobecome literate (Faulkner & Cook, 2006).

Many educators believe worksheets are very effective in developing literacy skills. According to Demircioglu & Kaymakci (2011) worksheets are effective in summarizing, strengthening, reiterating, and evaluating history lessons. With increase demand for teachers to provide students with motivational, student-centered, authentic learning experiencethat are challenge in their zone of proximal development,the use of worksheets and package programs in elementary classrooms have been placed underthe microscope. These programs generally consist of teachers’ instruction manual with key concepts, students’ textbooks with activities for building mechanics, grammar and usage skills, related workbook at different stages below mastery, mastery and above mastery, transparencies with graphic organizers on related skills being taught and computer software to help reinforce skills in the books. According to Costello (2012) package programs may be easy to deliver, but they may not be the most ideal for developing literacy skills, they are general and not tailored to the needs of specific students. No program has the answer to all students literacy needs and not all teachers have the same ability to be flexible in tailoring programs to students’ needs.

Most teachers run the risk of doing less direct instruction, rather than active student-center learning, because of pressure from the demand of the education system for students to achieve mastery on state tests. Although teachers recognize the significance of including active and student–centered strategies in their classroom, state tests seem to influence the curriculum resulting in more teacher-focused strategies mainly lectures, worksheets, and whole–class discussion (Faulkner & Cook, 2006).

Educational theorists influence educational practices in the classroom. Sablis (2006) also supports Castello views that regardless of the approach that is used to teach literacy skills, teachers’ instruction is believe to be the most effective tool in helping learners to achieve their potential, thus the teachers’ roleis integralin guiding the outcome of lessons. The quality of instruction and assessment depends on the teachers’ ability to plan and execute a well-structured lesson to the needs of all in theclassroom. According to the multiple intelligences learning theory teachers should vary instruction and assessment strategy because all students do not learn and exhibit learning the same way (Smith 2002, 2008) *Howard Gardner and Multiple intelligences*. It is imperative that teachers gather data from various forms of assessment (e.g., criterion reference tests, standardize test, and students’ work sample); these can be used to identify students who are performing below mastery level, literacy strategy can then be targeted to improve students’ reading and writing skills ( Edwards, Mokhtari, and Rosemary, 2007).

**Social Interaction**

Eckevarria and Vogt (2010, p. 8) state that “teaching literacy skills in an increasingly diverse school population is a challenge because many students become disengaged from learning at an early age” Some students may come from homes that do not instill values in literacy skills practiced at school. Based on Eckevaria and Vogt opinion classroom environment should be highly engaging and stimulating to encourage students to participate fully in activities to develop literacy skills. According to Albert Bandura’s social learning theory, students learn by observing and imitating model in their surrounding (McLeod, 2011). Fowler, Irwin, Moore, and Tornatore (2012) held a similar view to McLean that the spoken language is critical in vocabulary development because children who have much interaction among adults posses a rich, vocabulary unlike those who had little interaction; they hear command rather than prompt and questions.

According to Speaker (2001) early childhood theorists have always opposed to the passive learning theory, and although many researchers in early childhood field robustly recommended interactive learning, it was not evident in the classroom, but the traditional pedagogy utilizing worksheets was present. Speaker research on Hands-on children’s museum in the United States to investigate commonalities that offer interactive learning environment found out that some aspects of the Hands-on children museum could be utilized inelementary classroom. Thedata indicated a high favorable rating for some subjects that are taught in elementary school: Life/Nature science, Physics, History and Environment. Teachers can combine the Hands-on model with the traditional method of using worksheets, lectures and basal reading tasks in any subject area, and be effective in creating interactive, stimulating classroom environment that promotes the development of higher order thinking skills thus increasing students’ performance

Many researchers are advocates for the engagement of students in meaningful learning activities that motivate students to develop literacy skills. According to Ausubel’s meaningful verbal learning theory, learners create meaningful learning from rote learning when they link new knowledge to existing knowledge in the schema (Hassard, 2003). Graphic organizers help learners to understand task by nurturing active participation, decrease dependency on rote learning and memorization, tap into learners’ prior knowledge, and show association between concepts to build new understanding (Kirylo & Millet, 2000). Tink-Tac-Toe a highly motivational a game like activity is an alternative to work sheets, it involves a nine square grid boards with authentic learning activities related to skill(s) being taught; the teacher selects activities that are meaningfully and motivational and guides students to accomplish the goals and objective of the lesson (Sambli, 2006). When students are motivated intrinsically they enjoy learning thus they put more effort into leaning as they are empowered to take control of their learning. When teachers use the SIOP model (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) information is presented to learners in a meaningful way that enhances learning (Eckevarria &Vogt 2010); results from reaches done with the model indicated that students’ academic achievement are increased dramatically with the model. Instruction in the model can be modified to students’ needs (e.g., give hand – on- experiment).

Lavender (2000) is also in support of meaningful learning, in an authentic way. Getting students involve in personal writing motivate them, they read and write about authentic material; learning becomes more meaningful to them as they make connection to the activity whether by reading or writing. Write Fist Time Paper once funded by the predecessor of the Basic Literacy Skills Agency encouraged writers to write in order to develop literacy skills of drafting, redrafting and editing their work to be published. This provided opportunities for many normal community writers and publishers to develop self-confidence, even those who one would rarely heard in the public domain.

**Student-centered learning**

(Faulkner & Cook, 2006) states that the No Child Left Behind Act and highs-stakes assessments influence the curriculum and teaching and learning activities that take place the classroom. Although they had good intention to hold schools and teacher accountable for students’ achievement, they put pressure on classroom teachers. High–stakes assessments allow schools to set performance goal, and focus for the school curriculum, reveal academic progress to stakeholders and finally provides additional funding, resources through federal programs. Advocates of the middle school educational system believed adolescents should be taught using the student-centered approach to gain first-class educational experience. According to the constructivism theory learners create knowledge for themselves by interacting with teacher and other learners in a classroom, the teacher’s role is mainly to assist learner construct their knowledge, *Constructivism “Student-centered Learning vs. Traditionalism* (Rogers, 2009).

Assessment plays an imperative role in developing literacy skills. According to Faulkner and Cook (2006) the shift in emphasis towards academic standards and corresponding assessment in the Unites States of America has influenced many states to reform their educational system in line to overall established academic standards. The state of Kentucky reforms their educational system in 1990 through an act which focused on six key goals for student to achieve upon completion of high school, namely acquire basic numeracy and literacy skills, problem solving in mathematical concepts, social studies, sciences and humanities, active and responsible community members, and ability to transfer knowledge and experience. Comsky-Higgins, Kanfer, and Lipson (2011) support Faulkner and cook view that high-stakes tests may have negative implication for students learning because they do not cater to the needs of individual student. Chomsky-Higgins, Kanfer, and Lipson, believed that although some students receive good quality classroom instruction and struggle with literacy they will continue to struggle if instructions are not tailored to their specific strengths and weaknesses. Based on the views expressed by Higgins, Kanfer, and Lipson and Faulkner and Cook each child in a classroom has specific issues that may impede or foster their learning.

Chen,DeBarger, Means, Padilla (2011, p. 4) stated that “in the past, teacher training generally did not include data analysis skills or data-driven decision-making processes (Choppin 2002). Without data skills, teachers are ill prepared to use data effectively to provide instruction that matches students’ needs” Data Analysis Framework an instructional tool that provides school teams with a method for arranging, interpreting and using multiple source and type of data for instructional decision making was proposed because many classroom teachers collected data and failed to use them however, there are those who did not know how to develop a proper system of collecting and using data in making decision on instructional strategy in the classroom (Edwards, Mokhtari, & Rosemary, 2007). This is a collaborative approach to teaching; it involves a team comprising school-based literacy coach, principal, data manager and grade–level teacher representative in an elementary school. Classroom teachers who interface with the students on a daily basis gather the data using various forms of summative and formative assessments while the team analyses, and construct elucidation that they can transform into goals and action. Students vocabulary can be assessed formally or informally to envisage their literacy skills, formal assessment such as standardize tests which are Norm-referenced (NRTs) assess students’ performance at grade level, while informal assessment (e.g., observation, checklist, pretest writing activity) and Criterion-referenced tests (CRTs) which are not standardize, but are use to determine whether or not students master literacy skills (DeVries, 2012). Observing students is a more reliable method of assessing students than standardize tests. However, teachers are better able to help their student learn when they cautiously gather and combine documented assessment gained informally with scores from standardized tests (Casbergue, 2011).

It is imperative that teachers reflect on their practices in the classroom so that best practices are used in instructing and assessing literacy skills. Miller and Vaeatch (2010) Line C model which utilizes the scaffolding technique for teaching literacy skills, teachers reflect on their knowledge about the students and the curriculum to guide them in choosing instructional strategy.

**Scaffolding**

The scaffolding theory was introduced in 1950s by Jerome Bruner a cognitive psychologist. Vygotsky, Wood, Burn, & Rose (as cited in Mcgee, Ukrainetz, 2009, p. 600) defined scaffolding as the “*intentional, strategic support* [emphasis added} that teachers provide that allows children to complete a task they could not accomplish independently” According to Vygotsky scaffolding theory, Lipscomb, Swanson, and West (2004) learners can do task with support within their zone of proximal development or actual developmental level however, they need support by peers and adults to do task out of their zone of proximal or potential developmental level. Each learner requires different level of scaffolding; teachers should monitor students’ progress to determine their level of support particularly when new concepts are being taught; this support should be gradually withdrawn as students learn concept and are able to function independently. Choo, Rotgans, Yew, and Schmidt (2011) problem based research findings correlated with previous studies that soft scaffoldings namely tutoring, small group collaborated are essential for problem- based learning.

Excellent reading instruction is the most important factor against reading failure. Teachers’ ability to get response from student during reading varies, because all teachers do not possess the same level of ability to connect with students. Also, their ability to select instructional material and instructional strategy may impact on students’ ability to read. Many strategies are available that teachers can use to support students having difficulty to comprehend expository text. The challenge which confronts most teachers is to know when to use which strategy; teachers can choose many instructional strategies, but it is more difficult to find a justification of how an effective teacher chooses and uses those (Miller & Veatch, 2010).

The Whole Language approach to reading is based on the premise that reading is a natural process, like learning to speak, and that children exposed to a great deal of authentic, connected text will naturally become literate without much explicit instruction in the rules and conventions of printed text. The Phonetic approach is based on the premise that children require a great deal of explicit instruction in the rules of printed text; therefore students are scaffold with the Phonetic approach while little or no scaffold is given with the Whole Language approach. According to Amendum, Yongmei Hall, Fitzgerald, Head-Reaves, & Hollingsworth (2009) reading lesson instructions are characterized by (1) teacher’s instruction style, (2) teacher’s grouping strategy; whole class and small group (3) teacher’s focus of reading; words or comprehension (4) level of student’s response (5) instructional material, narrative text and work sheets. Their research done to investigate if there is a relationship between reading instructional characteristics and student’s reading instructional achievement finding indicated that it is not conclusive that there is a direct relationship between reading instruction characteristics and student’s instructional reading level, but a complex relationships exist in selecting reading level instruction. Previous studies have also shown that no single strategy is effective in teaching reading comprehension; Bereiter & Bird (as cited in Hurry & Parker 2007). Therefore, students should be openly taught with a mixture of strategies (e.g., teacher modeling thinking aloud) and students should be allowed to put them practice. Inquiry, modeling, shared writing, collaborative writing, independent writing (IMSCI) is a model for scaffolding writing instruction in the lower grades of elementary school, It integrates reading and writing instruction; the teacher does a read-aloud of a book that belongs to a particular genre and model the writing process of the particular genre. Teacher and students then work together to write in the particular genre, students then collaborate in small group to write, students then work independently to write (Reid, 2010).

**Worksheets**

Kaymakci (2012, p. 61) states “worksheets are *practical* *useful* *and economic* [emphasis added] materials to use in educational activities” According to Demircioglu, and Kaymakci (2011) one of the most effective tools to enhance teaching and learning are worksheets because they help students to construct knowledge in their schema, used to assess students and get feedback, use as supplemental material to text books in authentic lesson, and build scaffold for some teaching strategies (e.g., demonstration, cooperative and collaborative learning). Harns and KombaB (2008) conducted a research in an Austrian grammar school to investigate if worksheets are effective in acquiring knowledge, and if the design of worksheets impact on students learning. Findings from this research correlated with previous researches that worksheet are effective in enhancing knowledge acquisition only when students have prior knowledge of the subject matter and when worksheets are design using the open task format which stir students’ interest and challenge them in their zone of proximal development .

The use of worksheets in a classroom as an instructional tool or seatwork activity should not be seem as merely a matter of personal choice to teachers, but rather a curriculum and goal driven choice, in other words worksheet activities should be based on the goals and objectives of a lesson. Giving students worksheets without adequate soft scaffolding (e.g., small group collaboration) can frustrate learners when they are no able to connect with the task.

According to Pincus (2005) many classroom teachers continue to assign worksheets as seatwork activities to occupy students’ time while they teach some other students, although many researchers detest the practice because it does not provide on–the-spot teacher intervention. In addition, because many workbook tasks which are a component of package programs lack interest, lack rich instructional opportunities, lack plain objectives, give incorrect feedback and take up valuable teaching time, teachers should evaluate their effectiveness in developing literacy skills by asking themselves are they goal orientated, are they providing effective and efficient means to reach goals and how can this workbook be best used for instruction, guided practice and pre and posttest.

Teacher can create their own work sheets or by ready-made ones, many sites are available on the web that allows teachers to create and or make their own worksheet, the opportunities are endless. ELS HQ one of the better sites available allows users to create their own worksheets, print, save or add to a community collection; it has 17 different formats with picture flashcard, labeling exercise, bingo games and others (Eastman, 2006).

**Hypothesis**

Implementing and engaging literacy strategies to 20 third grade students in a public elementary school in Brooklyn, New York, for forty-five minutes, four times per week over three months will increase their reading and writing skills.

**Method**

Participants

20 third grade students from a public Elementary school in Brooklyn New York. The participants are mainly African Americans and a few Mexican Americans, average age 8-years-old.

Instrument

Worksheets designed in the open and close task format.

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Dear Principal,

I am currently a graduate student in the Childhood Education Masters program at Brooklyn College. As a requirement for my Applied Theory and Research course I am required to do an Action Research in a classroom. I am in the process of doing my Action Research based on literacy and worksheets, therefore I am diligently seeking permission from you to do my research at your school in a third grade classroom. Over the course of three months I will implement literacy strategies four times per week with and without worksheets to investigate the effectiveness of worksheets in building literacy skills as an assessment and instructional tool.

If there are any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me via email at [Wildman.michelle@yahoo.com](mailto:Wildman.michelle@yahoo.com) Thanks in advance.

Sincerely,

Michelle Wildman

I\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ willingly give Michelle Wildman permission to conduct her Action Reach in X third grade classroom.

Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Dear parent/guardian,

I am currently a graduate student in the Childhood Education Masters program at Brooklyn, and I am in the process of doing an Action Research based on literacy and worksheets for my Applied Theory and Research course. In order for this research to be successful, I am seeking permission for your child to participate. This research will be conducted during regular school hours and participants will participate by doing regular learning activities in their classroom with and without worksheets as the research is designed to investigate the effectiveness of using worksheets to build literacy skills,

I would greatly appreciate your permission for your child to participate. All information that is obtained during observing students and other wise will be treated confidentially; the participant and their school will remain anonymous. If there are any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me via email at wildman.michelle @yahoo.com Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Michelle Wildman

………………………………………………………………………………………………

I \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (parent/guardian) read the information and agree

for\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (student’s name) to participate in the research

Worksheet from ELS HQ link

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Suffixes: -ful and -less

The suffix -ful means full of. The suffix -less means without.

Liz takes her time and paints with care. Dave paints without caring.

Liz is a careful painter. Dave is a careless painter.

Write a single word with -ful or -less to complete each sentence.

1. I am \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to have such a loving family.

(full of thanks)

2. Will saw a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ puppy wandering around town.

(without a home)

3. Carla, you look \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in that dress.

(full of beauty)

4. The squirrels in the backyard are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

(without harm)

5. Did you see the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ rainbow in the sky?

(full of color)

6. This broken toy is a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ piece of junk.

(without worth)

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